

# Arizona Office of Tourism

Three-Year Strategic Plan 2021-2024



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# OVERVIEW



This Three-Year Strategic Plan is an internal guiding document to support the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) in prioritizing the creation of an Arizona travel experience that is beyond compare.

The Planning Team met over several sessions and as a result articulated the following components of a Strategic Plan:

### Strategic Clarity



#### VISION

Describes the ideal future state we are striving to create



#### MISSION

Describes the primary focus of our organization, and what we do each day that helps us to realize our vision



#### VALUES

Describes the fundamental beliefs that shape how we work together and serve our Mission



#### REPUTATION

Describes what we want to be known for as an organization



#### POSITION

Describes the unique and sustainable value we deliver to our stakeholders

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### Strategic Focus & Action



#### IMPERATIVES

Identifies what must be accomplished over the planning horizon and our overarching areas of focus



#### INITIATIVES

Describes our finite-duration, discretionary projects or programs, outside our day-to-day operational activities, that will be taken on in service of our Imperatives



#### OBJECTIVES

Describes our measures of success

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### Strategic Planning Framework



In addition, the Team reviewed and updated the actions that will best continue the stabilization and recovery of Arizona's tourism industry, which are being monitored and tracked internally.

# THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN



## How to Use This Plan

This plan provides a “North Star,” composed of the Strategic Clarity components of a Strategic Plan. It also includes the actions and measurements necessary to achieve the Plan, which includes the Strategic Focus and Action portions.

Four Imperatives are at the center of the Strategic Plan. Each of these Imperatives is supported by a set of Initiatives designed to achieve the Imperative, and a set of Objectives that will measure progress. We may choose to work on several Initiatives at a time, or take on one or two at a time. The Initiatives are not meant to be an inflexible to-do list. Rather, they should be reviewed periodically to ensure that the work specified continues to meet the objectives of each Imperative and supports our Vision and Mission. The Strategic Plan is a longer-range document that is implemented alongside AOT’s day-to-day work.

The following are the fully annotated Strategic Clarity elements of the Plan; two of these components—Vision and Position—are abridged for the one-page Strategic Plan.



A night sky photograph featuring the Milky Way galaxy in the upper half, with a rocky desert landscape in the lower half. The text is overlaid on the top left.

**THREE-YEAR  
STRATEGIC PLAN:  
STRATEGIC CLARITY**



## VISION

Create an Arizona experience that captures and nurtures the hearts and minds of people who call it home and travelers the world over in search of extraordinary adventure and natural wonders.



## MISSION

We stabilize and strengthen local economies, protect environmental and cultural resources, create a meaningful visitor experience, and enhance the quality of life for all Arizonans through tourism collaboration, promotion, and development.



## VALUES

**We step up.** We always rise to do what Arizona needs. We are stewards of the Arizona experience for residents and travelers alike and work to ensure their travel experience is unique and heartfelt. We are willing to take on and execute work outside our typical wheelhouse, knowing people trust our team to deliver successful outcomes. And we are dedicated to the long-term sustainability of Arizona's assets, promoting responsible tourism practices that ensure Arizona will be explored, enjoyed, and celebrated for generations to come.

**We thrive together.** Our industry is stronger when we work together toward shared visions and goals. We do all we can to ensure our vision for Arizona tourism includes all our partners and the visions they have for their destinations. We are inclusive and believe in the power of collaboration. We value and seek out partnerships, knowing that more can be achieved together.

**We see the big picture.** While we are focused on sustainable growth of travel, our highest focus is the benefit the tourism industry provides to Arizona. We want to see all its communities thrive, and ensure the state is welcoming to all for the long-term. We actively listen to what our partner communities are seeking, and work to help bring that vision to fruition. When there is a need in the industry, we seek to address it and strengthen the industry in the process.

**We care for the team.** We are able to take care of our industry and visitors only as well as we are able to care for one another. We make it a priority to support one another so that we may all reach our full potential while doing our best work each day.



## POSITION

Arizona is synonymous with grand and timeless vistas—Grand Canyon, Saguaro, and the Petrified Forest National Parks are known the world over. The reputation of the energy vortex and scenic beauty of Sedona has created their own lore. Arizona's indigenous history and culture enthrall visitors from around the globe. Visitors marvel at the state's timeless connections to the cosmos through its many dark sky communities.

And Arizona is so much more. Our luxury resorts attract discerning visitors in search of deeper relaxation. Our venues attract fans to wide ranging sport experiences, from youth, to amateur, to professional events. Our growing wine industry and multi-cultural culinary creations are attracting new visitors in search of the latest and greatest. Our cities offer high quality meeting space, including world-class tier 1 convention facilities. For the traveler who seeks it all, Arizona is the place.

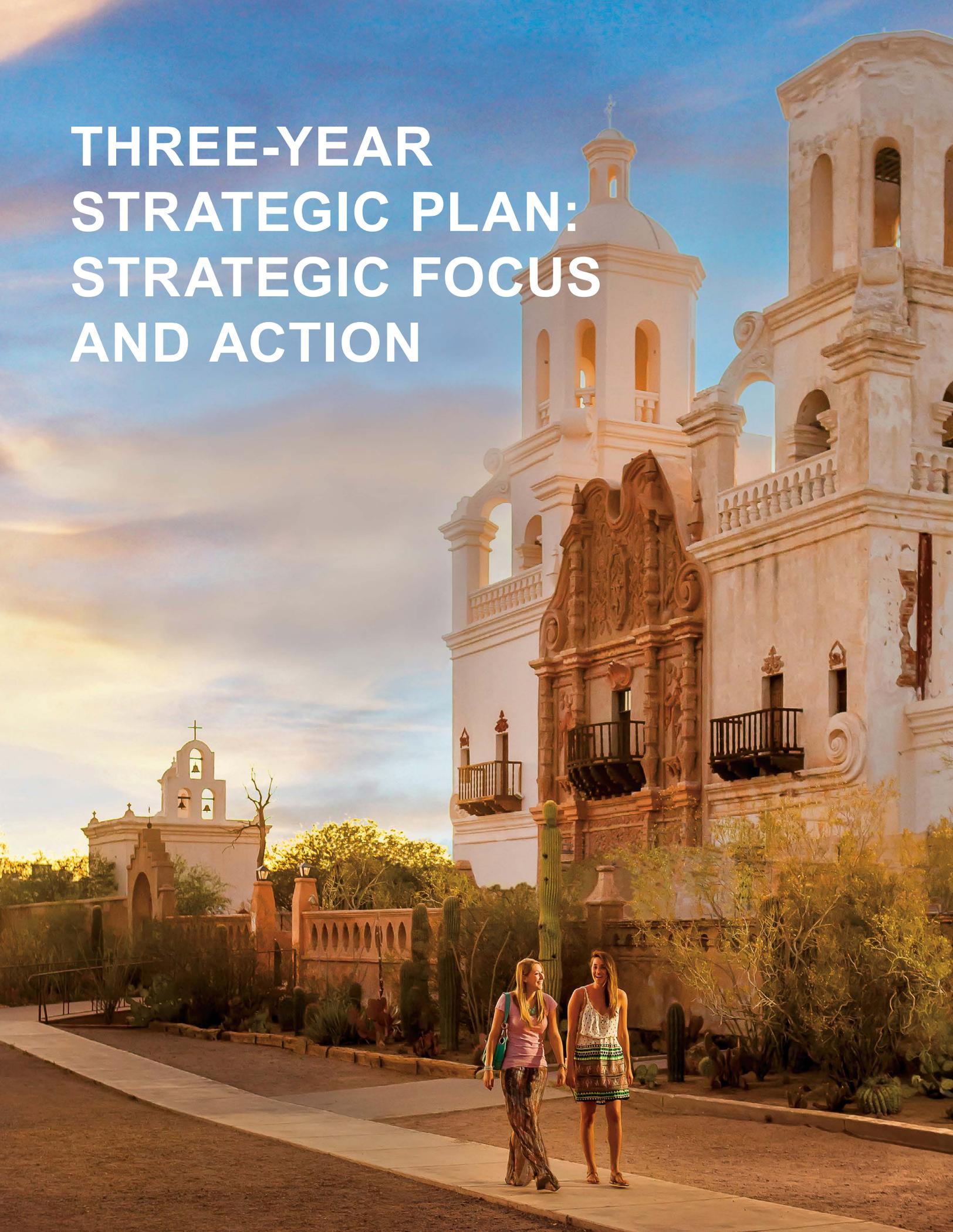


## AOT REPUTATION

We will be known as:

- Trusted and responsive statewide industry leaders
- Creative and innovative partners
- Collaborative stewards of the Arizona experience
- Knowledgeable destination experts

# THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN: STRATEGIC FOCUS AND ACTION



# Balance statewide visitation across time, place, and traveler type

## OBJECTIVES

- Meet 2019 statewide RevPAR levels by 2024.
- Increase length of stay year-over-year.
- Increase overall visitor spend and reduce seasonal fluctuation.
- Support the Meetings Mean Business campaign.

## INITIATIVES

**Promote little-known and unique destinations to better attract desired visitation, and to balance visitation.** Arizona has a surfeit of incredible places to see and discover. However, most visitors know about and visit only a few major attractions. This has prompted regional imbalances in visitation patterns. To address this, AOT will expand existing efforts to highlight lesser-known destinations and raise their prominence as a way to distribute visitation across all tourism assets Arizona offers.

**Enhance promotion of off-season and shoulder travel.** Arizona's regions experience unique seasonal visitation patterns. For example, the Northern region has higher visitation in summer and lower in the winter, while the Maricopa County area experiences the reverse. AOT will collaborate with local travel partners to promote experiences that extend higher visitation windows by promoting travel in the shoulder and off-seasons to bring greater balance to annual visitation patterns.

**Update target marketing to align with updated traveler personae.** The COVID-19 pandemic has altered travel and tourism—who visits, why they visit, where they go, what they do, and how they travel. AOT is revisiting and updating its travel personae profiles to ensure they are reflective of current visitor attributes. Once complete, AOT will work to align its marketing activities with these personae. Doing so will allow AOT to better promote unique destinations within the state, targeting specific visitor profiles, and continue to achieve greater balance in visitation patterns.

**Enhance niche-audience marketing campaigns (DEIA, LGBTQ+ audiences).** While Arizona has historically strived to be inclusive of all visitors, more can be done to connect with niche audiences and to highlight Arizona as welcoming to all. And with opportunities for promotion—such as Mesa becoming the first ever autism certified city, and a destination mindful of all senses—AOT has fantastic destinations and experiences to share.

**Partner with event organizers and conference planners to promote leisure travel collateral to extend event stays.** Arizona attracts and hosts numerous mega-events, for example multiple Super Bowls, with the next one scheduled for 2023. Other examples include NCAA Men's and Women's Final Four tournaments, PGA and LPGA events, NASCAR, NHRA racing, and major marathons. Combine this with ample meeting and convention space, regional museums, hiking trails and state parks, and it's clear that there are opportunities to extend average visitor stays throughout the year. AOT and other partners will collaborate with organizers of these events to promote other experiences that could be added onto the primary purpose of travel to extend a stay. For example, regional museums, hikes, state parks, etc. could be promoted at a conference to entice an attendee to stay for a day or two longer than the conference.



# Strengthen Arizona’s position as an international destination for desired travelers

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase flight bookings.
- Increase average international spend.
- Increase frequency of positive international article coverage.

## INITIATIVES

**Expand marketing campaigns to larger tour operators to increase the diversity of Arizona’s product offerings.** Prior to the pandemic, many international tours focused on a few key attractions in Arizona to draw visitors, such as the Grand Canyon and cultural experiences such as those on the Navajo Nation lands. Current studies demonstrate that visitors are seeking more than the offerings of a traditional itinerary. AOT will continue its work with tour operators to develop and market new and multi-state itineraries that integrate niche experiences, with a goal of attracting international travelers eager to explore more of what Arizona has to offer.

**Reinvest in Arizona’s international strategy to enhance competitiveness.** It is a given that Arizona has extraordinary experiences to attract international visitors. And so do other states in its competitive set, such as California. As the world emerges from the impacts of the pandemic and begins to look toward international travel again, Arizona has the opportunity to reinvest in its international strategy to ensure it remains competitive and on top of visitors’ minds when they begin to plan global travel.

**Expand international spend tracking options.** AOT’s knowledge of how international travelers spend while in market is limited to a few tools such as VisaVue. To have a more robust picture of how international travelers spend while in Arizona, AOT will research and investigate other tracking options, and expand its tracking accordingly.



# Support the diverse needs of our industry partners to cultivate and sustain a thriving and inclusive tourism economy

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase the number of AOT staff engagements with stakeholders statewide.
- Demonstrate access to equitable funding opportunity by region/county.
- Begin tracking partner sentiment via annual survey.

## INITIATIVES

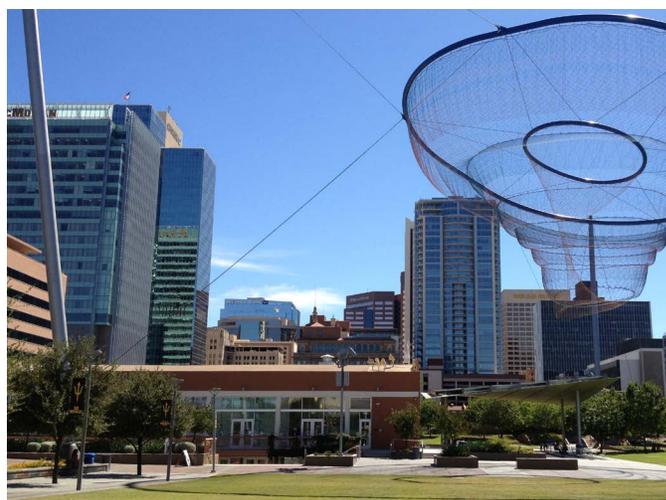
**Enhance DMO partnerships to bolster business travel.** Business travel has been one of the more notable casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will take a team effort to bring it back to Arizona. While AOT is promoting the Meetings Mean Business campaign, partnerships with local DMOs to promote specific venues, hotels and MICE opportunities will help to accelerate the return of business travel. This will mark a significant post-pandemic achievement and bring needed support to the state's tourism industry.

**Seek partnerships to support smart development of tourism-support infrastructure statewide.** The success of tourism depends on smart transportation infrastructure, wayfinding, affordable housing for industry workers, reliable broadband, and many other systems. While AOT cannot address these systems directly, it can influence their ongoing development by providing needed information and education to partner organizations that manage them.

**Continue partnering with Tribal nations to support their tourism goals.** The beauty and unique experiences available on the Tribal Lands of Arizona drive considerable travel and tourism. The historic, outdoor and cultural opportunities on Tribal lands, as well as their casinos and golf courses, entice visitors to explore and stay. These communities have also been confronting different public health dynamics during the pandemic than Arizona. AOT will continue to partner with Tribal Nations to support their tourism goals in light of all they have to offer, and all they are balancing.

**Partner to cultivate a strong, stable, and sustained hospitality workforce via industry partnerships.** Arizona, like the rest of the nation, has seen a marked decline in the size of its hospitality workforce. Many people were laid off or furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic, and the return to work has been slow—in part due to challenges presented by the pandemic and part by other employment choices made by former hospitality workers. Rebuilding the hospitality workforce will take a concerted effort by all hospitality partners to share the great stories of what it means to work within the industry and what opportunities for growth exist.

**Create and execute an application process with specific methodology and criteria for distribution of ARP funds.** At the end of June 2021, AOT announced that it was awarded nearly \$60M of American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds to distribute as grants throughout the state to support the tourism industry. Rebranded as the Visit Arizona Initiative, AOT is working quickly to ensure these funds are in the hands of partners throughout the state, having already created and initiated an application process. To ensure these funds support all of Arizona, AOT will implement a methodology and criteria for seeking equitable distribution of funds.



# Sustain the tourism product and experience by expanding AOT's destination management program, Appreciate AZ

## OBJECTIVES

- Establish baseline of awareness and support of Appreciate AZ.
- Establish baseline of adoption of Appreciate AZ material on partner webpages and materials.
- Achieve year-over-year increase in the number of people completing Appreciate AZ course offerings.

## INITIATIVES

**Continue to promote Appreciate AZ principles to residents and visitors.** As the popularity of Arizona's outdoor spaces continues to grow, so too does the potential degradation of its natural assets. To counter these potentially negative impacts on the state's great outdoors, AOT will continue its commitment to the [Appreciate AZ](#) principles. These espouse smart and informed stewardship of outdoor resources. By continuing to promote these principles to residents and visitors alike, Arizona is better positioned to maintain its natural assets and outdoor experiences well into the future.

**Continue curating and evolving education materials around responsible destination development.** There is an opportunity to continue to integrate smart stewardship principles into destination development by evolving education materials to include the Appreciate AZ principles. Since AOT offers education and training around the state, its curriculum can be updated to reflect best practices currently in place and ones the state wishes to encourage. Doing so will empower communities and partners around Arizona to approach their own destination development efforts with the benefit of best practices thinking.

**Develop a plan to engage residents and communities to foster and sustain positive sentiment for tourism.** The long-term success of Arizona's tourism economy relies on host communities understanding the value of tourism and creating welcoming experiences for visitors. AOT has utilized surveys in the past to better understand resident sentiment toward tourism and be responsive to patterns of concern. As part of its commitment to ensuring that tourism contributes to quality-of-life considerations, AOT will develop a resident engagement plan, based upon the findings of these surveys, and continue to take proactive steps to foster positive feelings among residents statewide.

**Promote educational opportunities of Appreciate AZ to industry, residents, and visitors.** In its leadership role, AOT can promote the stewardship principles of Appreciate AZ to all its stakeholders—including industry members, residents and visitors. AOT will use various venues and platforms to promote educational opportunities so that these principles become more broadly understood, adopted, and applied to ensure a sustainable tourism experience for generations to come.



# Arizona of Office Tourism

2021–2024 Strategic Plan



<b>Vision</b> Create an Arizona experience that captures and nurtures the hearts and minds of people who call it home and travelers the world over in search of extraordinary adventure and natural wonders.	<b>Mission</b> We stabilize and strengthen local economies, protect environmental and cultural resources, create a meaningful visitor experience, and enhance the quality of life for all Arizonans through tourism collaboration, promotion, and development.	<b>Values</b> At AOT, we work together and serve our mission with the following beliefs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We step up.</li> <li>• We thrive together.</li> <li>• We see the big picture.</li> <li>• We care for the team.</li> </ul>	<b>Reputation</b> We will be known as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusted and responsive statewide industry leaders</li> <li>• Creative and innovative partners</li> <li>• Collaborative stewards of the Arizona experience</li> <li>• Knowledgeable destination experts</li> </ul>	<b>Position</b> Arizona is synonymous with grand and timeless experiences. And Arizona is so much more. From luxury resorts to outdoor adventures, sports events to tribal culture, world-class cuisine to top-tier meeting space—Arizona is the destination for the traveler who seeks it all.
<b>Imperatives</b> Balance statewide visitation across time, place, and traveler type	<b>Objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet 2019 statewide RevPAR levels by 2024</li> <li>• Increase length of stay year-over-year</li> <li>• Increase overall visitor spend and reduce seasonal fluctuation</li> <li>• Support the Meetings Mean Business campaign</li> </ul>			<b>Initiatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote little-known and unique destinations to better attract desired visitation, and to balance visitation</li> <li>• Enhance promotion of off-season and shoulder travel</li> <li>• Update target marketing to align with updated traveler personae</li> <li>• Enhance niche-audience marketing campaigns (DEIA, LGBTQ+ audiences)</li> <li>• Partner with event organizers and conference planners to promote leisure travel collateral to extend event stays</li> </ul>
Strengthen Arizona's position as an international destination for desired travelers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase flight bookings</li> <li>• Increase average international spend</li> <li>• Increase frequency of positive international article coverage</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand marketing campaigns to larger tour operators to increase the diversity of Arizona's product offerings</li> <li>• Reinvest in Arizona's international strategy to enhance competitiveness</li> <li>• Expand international spend tracking options</li> </ul>
Support the diverse needs of our industry partners to cultivate and sustain a thriving and inclusive tourism economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of AOT staff engagements with stakeholders statewide</li> <li>• Demonstrate access to equitable funding opportunity by region/county</li> <li>• Begin tracking partner sentiment via annual survey</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance DMO partnerships to bolster business and leisure travel</li> <li>• Seek partnerships to support smart development of tourism-support infrastructure statewide</li> <li>• Continue partnering with Tribal nations to support their tourism goals</li> <li>• Partner to cultivate a strong, stable, and sustained hospitality workforce via industry partnerships</li> <li>• Create and execute an application process with specific methodology and criteria for distribution of ARP funds</li> </ul>
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